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TAGS: [IR](#) [TBIO](#) [TU](#) [PGOV](#) [WHO](#) [KSTH](#) [ECON](#) [KFLU](#)
SUBJECT: PREPARATIONS IN IRAN FOR AVIAN INFLUENZA

CLASSIFIED BY: Jason L. Davis, Consul General, Dubai, State
Department.
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

1.(C) SUMMARY: An official at the World Health Organization (WHO) says the WHO has very little information about Iran's avian influenza (AI) national pandemic preparedness but is confident in Iran's capability to diagnose AI cases. Iran is importing Tamiflu from Europe. The AI outbreak in Turkey along the border with Iran provides some insight into Iran's potential response to an AI outbreak inside its borders.

Identifying and Combating AI

2.(C) Dr. Wenqing Zhang, a scientist at the WHO's Epidemic and Pandemic Alert and Response Department in Geneva, informed ESTHoff via email that the WHO has very little information about national pandemic preparedness in Iran and the government has not submitted a plan to the WHO. However, the WHO has close collaboration with Iran's National Influenza Center (NIC) which is listed as one of the WHO's global "Collaboration Centers." In this capacity the NIC participates in annual influenza vaccine composition selection; its staff also participated in WHO influenza laboratory training last May as well as in other international meetings. Based on this training and personal interaction, Dr. Zhang expressed confidence in the ability of the NIC to properly diagnose AI cases should they occur.

3.(U) According to articles in the Iranian press, government officials continue to announce that no cases of AI have been found in Iran. These denials may have been prompted by two recent events: the early January outbreak of AI in Turkey and the deaths of several thousand birds in Iran's West Azerbaijan province in October and November of last year. Government officials attributed these deaths to botulism, not AI, citing tests conducted by Iran's Veterinary Organization. Seyed Mehdi Tabatabaie, deputy head of the Diagnosis and Treatment Department of Iran's Veterinary Organization told IRIB News that 38 quarantine outposts at border areas and 120 more throughout the country are prepared to take "preventative measures" if AI is discovered in Iran.

4.(C) Soheila Haghgoo, head of Iran's Pharmaceutical Chemistry Labs at the Ministry of Health's Department of Food and Pharmaceuticals, told ESTHoff January 25 that Iran is importing Tamiflu from Europe (presumably from the Swiss company Roche). Haghgoo's laboratory ensures that pharmaceuticals both imported

and produced in Iran are safe for consumption. She did not know how much Tamiflu was being imported or how it would be deployed in the event of a pandemic. Haghgoo believes that the government of Iran is prepared for and is educating its citizens about AI. However, she was only able to cite newspaper reports for this information, and living in Tehran, she said she was unaware of any effort to raise awareness among people in more rural areas.

Extrapolating from Iran's Recent AI Reaction

5.(C) The government of Iran's response to the early January discovery of AI in Turkey - less than 10 miles from the Iranian border - may offer some clues as to its national pandemic preparedness plans. Shortly after AI was confirmed to be present in Turkey, Iran restricted border access, began disinfecting vehicles crossing the border, and started to cull tens of thousands of birds in 234 villages throughout West Azerbaijan province, according to Tabatabaei. By January 26, about 50,000 birds had been culled. Tabatabaei told IRIB News that owners were being reimbursed approximately 2 dollars and 20 cents per chicken, out of a fund of roughly 2.2 million dollars set aside for this purpose. This compensation may help prevent poor Iranians from hiding or eating sick birds in the event of an AI emergency. Furthermore, Haghgoo told ESTHoff the border restrictions put in place after the discovery of AI in Turkey included denying entry to people who only wanted to cross into Iran for the day. This was probably done to discourage people who cross the border only to trade at vegetable and animal markets.

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